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ABSTRACT

This paper reports an attempt at re-education for mono-cultural teachers conducted in the Palo Alto-San Jose area of Northern California in 1968-69. The program ultimately involved three elementary school districts and provided cultural awareness education for more than 90 teachers. In addition there were a number of administrators, special services personnel, as well as school board members who received the training. Potential participants were contacted during the summer. Using the information contained on the application form, the 113 responding teachers were matched according to years of teaching experience, previous contact with disadvantaged children, and school district. They were then randomly allocated to two courses, one which was to begin in September and the other in January. With few exceptions, the teachers were willing to take the course at the time determined. The program itself consisted of ten three-hour evening sessions held at a local school. Each session had three parts: lecture, question-and-answer period, and the discussion groups. The research design employed was a pretest-posttest control group design with replication. The winter group served as a control for the autumn group. The second training program also provided the opportunity for replication. (Author/JM)

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INSERVICE TRAINING OF TEACHERS FOR CULTURAL AWARENESS: A FIELD EXPERIMENT

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INSERVICE TRAINING OF TEACHERS FOR CULTURAL AWARENESS: A FIELD EXPERIMENT

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The Need for Cultural Awareness Education

It is increasingly dysfunctional to think of the "American way of life" as a homogeneous set of values or behaviors. The persistent problems that surface every year in the form of intergroup violence attest to the fact that ethnic, racial and cultural differences do exist. Yet the schools too often continue to promote the image of America as a melting pot within which individual differences are boiled down into a single blended stew in spite of the fact that this image is not congruent with social reality.

Educational assumptions are needed which are more complex and capable of relating to the diverse needs of people living in pluralistic or multi-ethnic societies. The purpose of the educational system according to a pluralistic model would be to prepare people for life in a multi-ethnic society and indeed in a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse world.

One of the limiting factors concerning the attainment of a pluralistic educational model is the mono-cultural teacher. Mono-cultural teachers often do not understand the behavior of their culturally different students. In the classroom, this results in what might be called "cultural blindness." Many teachers would agree with one

who told me, "I apply the same standards to Mexican American children that I apply to all children. I love them, have fun with them, respect them as individuals, expect them to respect me, and discipline them as I do Anglo children." What in fact takes place, however, is the handing out of a single treatment to children who have different backgrounds and who are, as a result, decoding what the teacher says in different ways. Conversely, if a teacher assumes she treats all the children the same but fails to differentiate their responses on the basis of their cultural background, she is in fact failing to communicate with the children who do not use her own language, "silent" as well as "spoken." The consequences of faulty communication are often damaging to both teacher and student.

It is important to provide re-education for mono-cultural teachers if the development of a pluralistic climate in the classroom is to be achieved. The teacher is the person responsible for the management and the maintenance of a classroom climate. A pluralistic model of education must exist in the mind of the teacher if it is to grow in the minds of the students.

Teacher Re-education: A Case Study

This paper reports an attempt at re-education which was conducted in the Palo Alto-San Jose area of Northern California in 1968-69.

The program ultimately involved three elementary school districts and provided cultural awareness education for more than ninety teachers. In addition to the teachers, there were a number of administrators, special services personnel as well as school board members who received the training.

Field Work Prior to the Training Program

During the summer of 1968, preliminary field work was conducted in the San Francisco Bay area with a view to locating a suitable site for the teacher training program. The theoretical guidelines followed were provided by Lippit, Watson and Westley in their work The Dynamics of Planned Change. Those authors regard the change process as a series of phases. Once a problem is recognized--such as the need for cultural awareness--the change agent develops a working relationship with the client system. Various tasks must be performed during this phase including the clarification of the time perspectives and the involvement of various sub-units of the system in the development of a plan to be followed. Once the basic outline is agreed to, the salient problems in the client system are clarified. Goals are then established and alternative routes for attaining the goals are explored. Intentions then become transformed into action in the form of implementation of the program. Once intentions have been transformed into actual change efforts, one tries to ensure that the changes brought about are stabilized.

In the course of my own field work, several sites were identified which contained significant minority populations. The possibilities were narrowed to five which were listed in terms of variables including the nature of the predominant minority group, the general socio-economic level of the community, and ease of access to the schools and communities.

The District finally chosen as a base of operations was the Whisman Elementary School District. The District Superintendent - Mr. Ross Carter - made it clear that the district personnel and school board members knew they had a problem. Pressure was being exerted on the schools by the Mexican American community. Parents were insisting that the schools raise the self-esteem of their children. They wanted the second language and other abilities of the students to be recognized. They wanted teachers who showed racial bias to undergo sensitivity training. By the time I arrived, officials had received threats of Molotov cocktails.

In response to this situation, Superintendent Carter was encouraging a program of general curriculum revision from kindergarten through junior college. He was keenly interested in developing a model program which would assist other districts to respond more effectively to the needs of the minority communities.

Conversations were held with other staff members in order

to get a more complete picture of the history of the district's relationship with the Mexican American community. Interviews, conversations, meetings with community leaders and a study of various written reports confirmed the hypothesis that there were a number of teachers in the district and in the surrounding districts with little understanding of the problems of the Mexican American community. There was considerable encouragement for the idea of a course or training program which would expose the teachers to the cultural heritage and historical background of the Mexican American.

Teachers were contacted during the summer by letter from the Superintendent's office informing them of the plans for the course and inviting them to enroll. The letter mentioned that arrangements were being made for the course to be accredited through the State University Extension Service. The tuition charged for the course would be used to defray costs of the guest lecturers, discussion leaders and printed materials.

Twelve hundred were contacted. Of these, 113 returned the application forms. A pretest questionnaire was then mailed to each of the one hundred and thirteen with instructions to return the questionnaire before the commencement of school.

Using the information contained on the application form, teachers were matched according to years of teaching experience,

previous contact with disadvantaged children, and school district. They were then randomly allocated to two courses, one which was to begin in September and the other in January. With few exceptions, the teachers were willing to take the course at the time determined by the random procedure.

Description of the Training Program

The program itself consisted of ten three-hour evening sessions held in a local school. Each session had three parts: lecture, question-and-answer period, the discussion groups. The purpose of the lecture was to provide the teacher with information and contact with leaders from the minority community whom she would have unlikely met on her own. The question-and-answer period provided the opportunity to follow up the speaker's points and to engage in dialogue over issues that at times were controversial. The discussion group was intended to provide a supportive small-group climate in which the teacher would gradually become comfortable enough to share her hopes and aspirations as well as some of her problems and difficulties in the classroom. The small group was designed to provide support for the teacher while also helping the teacher see her own teaching methods and approach from different points of view. Through the discussions, the teachers were to relate what was discussed in the lecture to their own classroom.

The presentations of information were related to the background factors influencing the Mexican American. Each was designed to give the teachers a view of the reality existing outside the school in the community. The following topics were covered:

Introduction to Intercultural Studies

Mexican-American Organizations

The Struggle for Improvement of Labor Conditions

Latin Cultural Values: Cultural Differences

Latin Cultural Values: Religion and the Family

Problems Encountered by Spanish-Speaking Children While Learning English

Home Visitations

Techniques for Developing Student Participation in the Classroom

Value Conflicts Between the Mexican American Children and the School

The lecture series provided the participants with a cross-sectional view of the attitudes existing in the Mexican American community. The range from revolutionary to conservative was represented thus providing a first-hand exposure to the diversity of views that exists. To supplement the lectures and discussions, a home-visit project was introduced to bring teachers in closer touch with the families of the Mexican American community.

Research Design

The design employed was a pretest-posttest control group design with replication. As mentioned earlier, participants were randomly placed in two training groups. One group received training in the autumn quarter, the other group in the winter. The winter group thus served as a control for the autumn group. The second training program also provided the opportunity for replication.

Data Collection

The data collection instrument was a questionnaire developed by Dr. Harold Jonsson from San Francisco State College. It was modified for use with teachers of Mexican American children. Four distinguishable subscales were identified for each of two major attitudinal dimensions -- tolerance and optimism. One subscale was selected from each dimension for purposes of analysis. Information used to determine the validity of the subscales was gathered through structured classroom observations and interviews with teachers, principals and students.

Typology of Teacher Orientation

At the conclusion of the project, the two scales -- optimism and tolerance -- were studied to determine the extent to which different levels of each variable could be labeled in a way that would represent their different meanings. The process involved in arriving at a typology was reflective-inductive. Observations and scale scores

of teachers were sifted and reflected upon in order to arrive at labels which seemed to do justice to what the person said in conversations and which bore some relation to their relative positions on the scale.

The labels which were chosen to represent the different levels of the dimension of optimism are pessimistic, realistic, and idealistic, for levels of low, medium and high optimism. The labels chosen to represent different levels of the tolerance dimension are conservative, moderate, and liberal, for levels of low, medium and high tolerance.

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* Definitions of the labels:

Pessimistic: The out-of-school environment places irremediable handicaps on the potential of the Mexican American child to achieve in school.

Realistic: The out-of-school environment imposes handicaps, but with proper attention, the child can overcome a large portion of the handicaps and achieve as a normal child.

Idealistic: Every child possesses similar ability and potential, regardless of background.

Conservative: The militant movement is a negative force; it does more harm than good. The idea of the American dream-the self-made man-accuretely reflects how people rise in the society.

Moderate: The ideas of the militant movement are not as accurate as those of the protestant work-ethic.

Liberal: The militant viewpoint is correct. Social change is necessary to meet the demands of the militants.

When considered in combination, nine cells are formed ranging from the Idealistic Liberal who is high in both optimism and tolerance to the Pessimistic Conservative who is low on both scales.

Typology of Teacher Orientation

TOLERANCE SCALE	Pessimistic	Realistic	Idealistic
Liberal (High)	Pessimistic Liberal	Realistic Liberal	Idealistic Liberal
Moderate (Medium)	Pessimistic Moderate	Realistic Moderate	Idealistic Moderate
Conservative (Low)	Pessimistic Conservative	Realistic Conservative	Idealistic Conservative

Pessimistic (Low) Realistic (Medium) Idealistic (High)

OPTIMISM SCALE

Results

The training program increased the ability of the teacher to tolerate the self-assertiveness of minority people. The reasonableness of the demands became more apparent once the teachers understood the background factors which were giving rise to self-assertiveness.

The program also increased the teachers' understanding of alternative procedures (approaches and strategies) for improving the learning situation. The following quotation sums up the responses of several teachers:

> The course has provided a much more rounded understanding of their culture and the effect that this culture has on them today. The understanding of the family structure was indeed valuable since in my experience the father has not been seen at school as often as the mother. I also have further understanding for the mother who does not come to school because she speaks another language. When this situation occurs, I realize as a teacher I have more alternatives (my italics), one of which would be a home visit, merely as a means for the parents to know me casually and perhaps remove the fear of school.
>
> I also feel more prepared to teach the culture of the Mexican-American because I'm interested in learning more details of their history. They have an intriguing, rich background which I know only sketchily.

One of the most important of the new alternatives was the positive home visit where the teacher would visit to praise the child's progress rather than point out the negative aspects of his performance:

> I also got a deep interest in the home visiting--just doing as much as I could. They were an unknown culture before I took the course.

Teachers benefited from the home visits and also from learning more about the reactions of other teachers to the visits as well as to other aspects of the course. The following quotation suggests the scope of what was gained and also pinpoints the home visitations as being a critical aspect of the training program:

> I was grateful to hear what the speakers had to say, and was enchanted at hearing what other teachers at other levels had to say about how they feel, what they think, what they're doing, and what they recognize and what I feel they don't recognize. That was exciting for me, and I think this would not have occurred outside the course. It's something they don't talk about in the coffee rooms but we did talk about it in the course. This was

> tremendously important. . . . I felt strongly when I came away from the course that home visits were vital.

The new informational input provided by the speakers and through the discussion groups influenced the teachers' perceptions of the normative approach to be used with Mexcian American children. This influence was at the cognitive and affective level. Over time, where the influence was sufficiently strong, the teacher's behavior was affected and old habit patterns were modified in an acculturative direction.

It must be emphasized that cultural awareness education is appropriate where there is a desire on the part of the teachers and school system to recognize, value, and reward cultural differences. Cultural awareness education assumes that diversity can be valued in positive terms. Given this assumption, it should be possible to do much more than has been done in the past to reduce the amount of misunderstanding of human differences which separates person from person and contributes to conflict. As we learn from the diversity that exists within our own communities and in our own nations, we will be preparing for the challenges of creating and maintaining a hospitable, diversified environment aboard our space ship, the earth.

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